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COLOMBIA

# PEASANTS, VENEZUELAN TROOPS CLASH IN BORDER AREA

Bogota EL ESPECTADOR in Spanish 7 Sep 76 p 8-A

[Article by Anibal Crespo Polo]

[Text] Riohacha, 6 Sep--An armed confrontation between Colombian farmers and Venezuelan guard troops took place in the vicinity of the border zone known as La Meseta, which is in the jurisdiction of the municipality of Villanueva in the southern part of the department. It is not yet known whether there were any casualties.

This information was reported today by persons arriving from the town of El Molino, located close to the place where the incident occurred. They requested that their identities not be revealed.

The informants reported that the Venezuelan troops arrived on board three helicopters and rapidly began to search all the ranches of settlers where they live with their families. They were ordered to immediately vacate land they have owned for many years and where they have their corn, yucca and other crops.

The informants added that the Venezuelan troops alleged that the area occupied by the Colombian peasants is in Venezuelan territory and that they therefore had to abandon it. Since the peasants resisted the orders, the troops resorted to force and tried to take them to Venezuela as prisoners, which brought about the clash.

It was also stated that three of the farmers did not return to their homes and their fate is in doubt.

In addition, EL ESPECTADOR learned that a police squad was sent from this capital to the place of the incident. The command of that institution confirmed the sending of personnel but supplied no further details.

At least 2 years ago, over 300 peasant families were evicted by force by troops from the neighboring country. They were taken from Cano Mapuripo, Conejo and other places near the municipality of Fonseca and their families were completely abandoned. A series of invasions in the Mingueo region resulted, about which EL ESPECTADOR reported at the time.